

Although sharing much common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry, often Mary and Bob find themselves approaching ministerial concerns from different angles... *He said - She said* is a venue to share differing perspectives and provide food for thought.

Out of the Darkness...Light!

Mary's Perspective:

When I came into the church a couple of weeks ago, I unlocked and turned on lights the same way I always do - except that one bank of lights did not come on. It left the church feeling dim. Cozy, perhaps. Definitely an added sense of Advent. But dim. Coincidentally, when I came home that night, I discovered the light bulb in our garage door opener had burned out. Although the door opened, the garage was dark. This got me to pondering about light.

Lighting in a room or a theater or a church communicates a lot. The flashing lights at the end of intermission tell us to return to our seats. Our family room, illuminated by the crackling fire and twinkly Christmas lights, begs for cozy intimacy. My dark garage was somewhat creepy and reminded me that household tasks demand our attention. When a public space like our church is not fully lit, it suggests a problem - maybe a faulty switch (as was the case that night), or perhaps there is a funding concern. A bright, well-lit space feels welcoming and inviting. Attention to seemingly small details like malfunctioning light bulbs makes a difference in a visitor's impression.

We just celebrated the Nativity of our Lord, and no matter which set of readings were proclaimed, they all spoke of Light coming into the world.

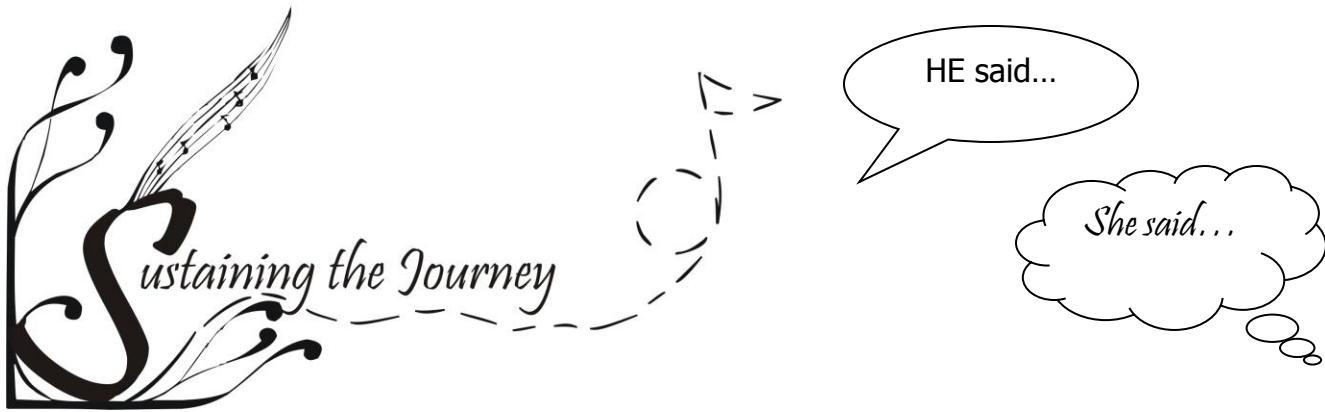
For Zion's sake I will not be silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet,
until her vindication shines forth like the dawn and her victory like a burning torch. Isaiah 62:1 (*Vigil Mass*)

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone. Isaiah 9:1 (*Mass during the Night*)

A light will shine on us this day: the Lord is born for us. Psalm 97 (*Mass at Dawn*)

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. John 1:9 (*Mass during the Day*)

As a liturgical musician, I absolutely dreaded Christmas this year. The whole concept of the fourth week of Advent lasting just a few hours, and the sheer quantity of masses was overwhelming.

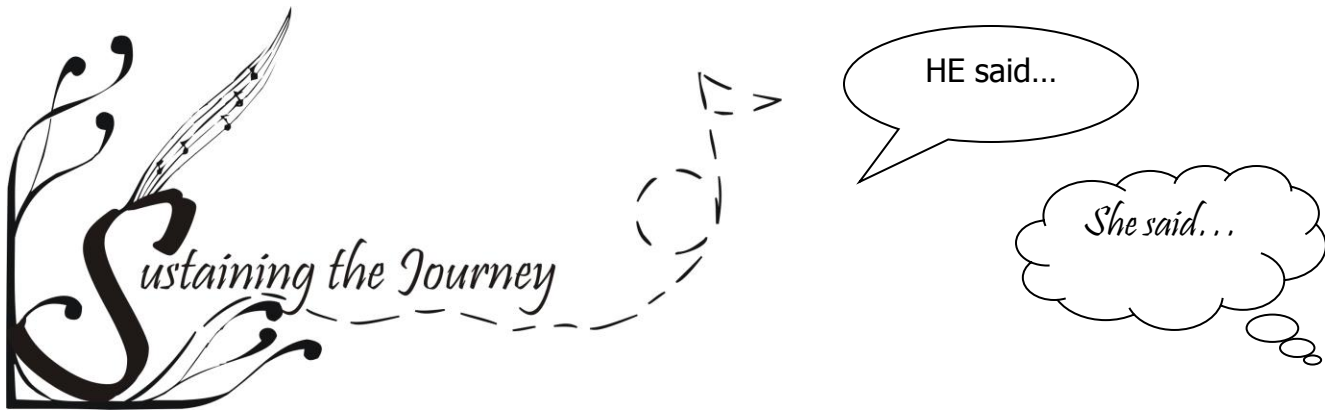


Without help, I would have worked 17 hours on Christmas Eve, before returning the next morning to start all over - not to mention then hurrying home to celebrate with my family and host guests for dinner! Celebrate? How about Survive?

When Bob and I plotted topics for this blog, we even planned for this one to address survival of crazy days like this year's Christmas... and I suppose I am waving a hand at that - but I also write with so much more than just a survival story. Out of the darkness of my dread came abundant light.

Advent and Christmas this year, for me, were filled with unexpected moments of grace. Here are just a few examples:

- Our Music Ministry hosts an evening called Blessing of the Bambelinas. It's part sing-along, part concert, part cookies/fellowship, part "bring the Baby Jesus from your creche for a blessing", and all prayer. This year, I was astounded by the number of members of our group that volunteered to proclaim Scripture, to help create a festive atmosphere, and to lead worship. These were folks who stepped out of their comfort zone to proclaim Light in the darkness (literally!)
- Through an amazing set of "coincidences" (we have a friend who calls them Godincidences) and the generosity of friends, all of the masses at both our parishes were covered AND Bob and I even managed to have dinner together on Christmas Eve.
- A couple weeks before Christmas, I had the rare opportunity to connect with a long-time friend who was in town. We ended up sharing a 4-hour lunch, during which the to-do list in my head was blissfully silent. I was able to be present in the moment and thoroughly enjoyed the day.
- On Christmas Eve morning, all of my children, their significant others, and some of their closest buddies (now fine young men) descended on my house, filling it with laughter and food and a warmth that can only be described as Light. I had not anticipated such a beautiful time, where my heart was full, nor have I ever been so relaxed before starting the marathon of masses.



-
- We had a visiting priest preside at the last mass that I played on Christmas. He is an old friend, who has been present in some of the darkest times of my life, gently guiding me through, praying with me along the way. Sometimes that last mass can pose a challenge, trying to stay engaged and energized. With incense and chant and even some Latin, that liturgy was truly a holy experience - far different than what might have been. I can only describe that as grace.

Where I had been dreading these weeks, I was blessed. Times I predicted to be dark, sleepless, exhausting, and mechanical turned out to be... well, somewhat sleepless and exhausting, but yet prayerful and filled with Light.

Sometimes, in our darkest moments, we need to surrender and allow the Light to fill us. You know we've written countless blogs on this, so I'll pose a question...

Whether in ministry or industry, part of a large family or living alone, blessed with abundance or struggling to make ends meet, Christmas can pose some unique challenges. Even amidst the darkness, where did you experience Light?

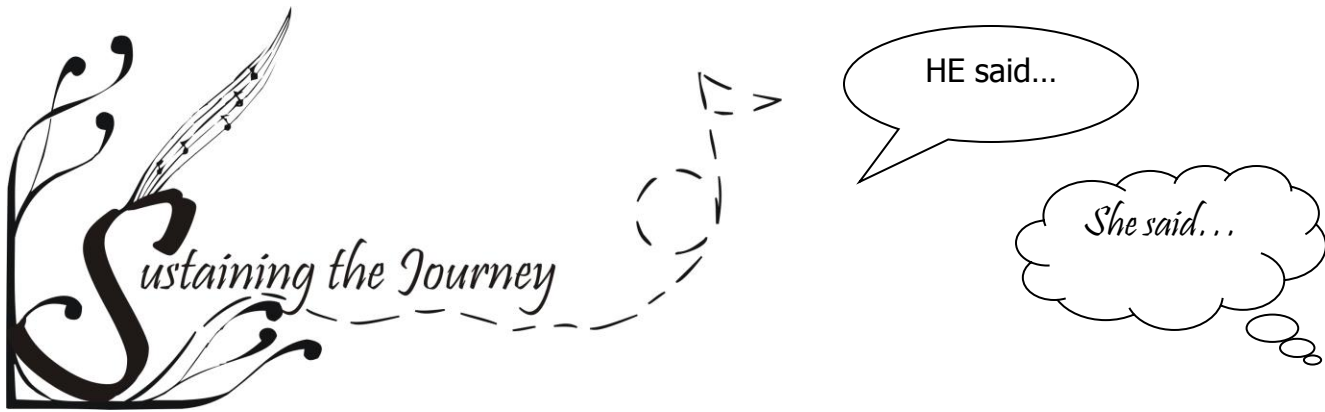
I'm not one for New Year's resolutions, but perhaps this year we could be a bit more attentive to Light in the darkness. Just sayin'!

Bob's Perspective:

As I read Mary's take on this week's topic, I was reminded of the old adage, "Necessity is the mother of all invention." In this particular case, survival of this year's peculiar liturgical calendar demanded an extraordinary amount of creativity and innovation.

The celebration of Christmas had many grace-filled and luminous moments for me as well. The members of my parish's music ministry – and the other ministries as well – really stepped up the plate and knocked the ball right out of the park:

- The shortened Advent Season gave us less rehearsal time for music, but each of the ensembles got together on their own to tweak and polish their presentations.
- A very creative and innovative Art and Environment team, challenged with the unusual occurrence of the Fourth Sunday of Advent falling on Christmas Eve, designed a plan that



produced an ecclesial environment that was respectful of the calendar, but sensible and pragmatic enough to be sensitive to our volunteers.

- Numerous Altar Servers, Lectors, Ushers and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion stepped forward to do “double duty” over the Advent/Christmas weekend without even having to be asked.
- As Mary mentioned, a few “*Godincidences*” occurred bringing good friends forward which allowed me to participate in several events at my home parish (where Mary is the Liturgy/Music Director) and still minister effectively at my “home-away-from-home parish” at which I work.
- I was even impressed with the number of people who actually went to Mass twice between Saturday and Monday.

All in all, the light out of the darkness in this case is that not only did we do it, but we did it very well – we didn’t merely survive, rather we excelled!

De tenebris ... lux!